A PASTORAL LETTER FROM A MINISTER TO HIS Parishioners,

Being an Earneſt

EXHORTATION

To them to take

Care of their SOULS;

AND

Preparative in order to render all his Future Methods of Inſtruction more effectual to their Edification.

DUBLIN:
Printed by *John Brocas* in *School-Houſe-Lane*, for *J. Millner*, Bookſeller in *Eſſex-ſtreet*, 1700.
Price ſtitcht 1*d*..

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

The Earneſt Exhortation of a Miniſter to his Pariſhioners to take Care of their Souls.

Moſt Dearly Beloved Neighbours.

MY Hearts deſire and Prayer to God for you is, that you may be ſaved; and my moſt ſincere Endeavours ſhall ever be, by all Chriſtian Methods I can think of, to promote your Salvation. And ing I cannot hope, either *by Doctrine*, or *by Reproof*, *by Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs*, to prevail upon thoſe, comply with any Methods I can deviſe for the good their Souls, who are not throughly ſenſible of the *orth* of them; I think it requiſite, in order to make y future Labours more effectual with you, to lay fore you ſuch Conſiderations, as may make you ſenſi- of the ineſtimable Value of your Immortal Souls. I take it for granted, that you believe you have uls. My buſineſs is to awaken you to a ſerious Con- n for their everlaſting Welfare; a Concern the oſt neceſſary of all others, and yet, I fear, very lit- laid to Heart; for otherwiſe, the generality of Men uld not poſſibly live as they do: They would not ploy all their Care and Pains in providing a Main- nance for theſe periſhing Bodies, and leave the moſt luable part of themſelves, their Souls, altogether glected. Were we to die as the brute Beaſts, and at when our dead Bodies are laid in the Grave, there ere an end of us; if this determined all our Hopes d Fears, and we returned to our native Duſt therein remain for ever; then might we Eat, and Drink, d take our fill of Pleaſure in this World, as too ma- y do: But if the Soul, when it leaves the Body, does

immediately enter into a ſtate of Happineſs, or Miſery; if there be a Reſurrection both of the Juſt and the Unjuſt, as moſt certainly there is; if a future Account muſt be given of every thing done in the Body, Whether it be Good, or whether it be Evil; and if our Eternal State ſhall be appointed us, either in Bliſs or Torment, according as we have behaved our ſelves in this life, as undoubtedly it ſhall; methinks it behoves every one of us, to look well about us, to enquire ſeriouſly what we have been doing all this while; whither the Path we are in leads us, and what will our future State be.

In order to perſwade you to apply your thoughts to theſe moſt important Conſiderations, I know no Method which (through God's Bleſſing) ſeemeth more likely, than to lay before you the ineſtimable Value of your Souls; the infinite Concern you have in their Welfare; how liable they are to be loſt and undone for ever; what excellent Proviſion our moſt Gracious God hath made for their Security; and how juſt it will be in him to condemn them to the extremity of Miſery, if you wilfully neglect the Care of them.

First, therefore, I intreat you to conſider the great Worth and Value of the Soul. Remember, that it is the immediate Off-ſpring of God; that it came from Heaven, from the Father of Spirits; *God breathed into Man the Breath of Life, and Man became a living Soul*, Gen. 2. 7. *God made Man in his own Image*, (not according to the likeneſs of any of the reſt of the Creatures) *a little lower than the Angels, and crowned him with Glory and Immortality.* This is our peculiar Privilege, beyond all the Beings of this lower World, that we reſemble our Maker, who is the moſt excellent Being. This is the Prerogative of that Spiritual and Immortal part of us, our Soul; and conſequently the Soul of Man muſt needs be exceeding Precious and Valuable.

Our

Our Bodies are Houſes of Clay, whoſe Foundati-
ns are in the Duſt; and though as the Pſalmiſt ſaith,
y are curiouſly wrought and faſhioned, yet all the
orkmanſhip beſtowed on them, is, that they may be
viceable to our Souls, fit Tabernacles for that Im-
ortal part to dwell in. The Worth whereof will
ther appear from that wonderful Eſteem thoſe have
it, who may be ſuppoſed to be beſt acquainted with
e true Value of Souls.

Thus God the Father takes great Delight in being
lled, and eſteemed, *a Lover of Souls*; and accord-
gly hath laid out his Thoughts from everlaſting, for
e bringing in of them to himſelf. The Councils and
ontrivances of Heaven have been ſpent on them. The
ther thought nothing too dear to ſecure and ſave
em; and therefore when he foreſaw we would not
ntinue in that ſtate of Innocence, and Happineſs,
herein we were at firſt created, he contrived to
ake us capable of another Happineſs, and that at no
s Expence than the Blood of his own Beloved Son.
d certainly God would not have thus concerned
mſelf about things of little value; no aſſuredly, our
uls are exceeding Precious in his Eyes, who hath
pared the greateſt Happineſs for them, and thought
hing too much to ſecure it.

Again, When the Son of God undertook to reſcue
m from the Slavery of Sin, and Dominion of the
vil, he thought it ſufficiently worth his while to
ſcend from Heaven, and put on the Form of a Ser-
nt, and make himſelf of no Reputation, to live a
ſerable Life, and die a painful and an accurſed
ath. And ſurely he had not ſo mean an Eſteem of
own heavenly Glory, (*Joh.* 1. 18.) as to part with
for Trifles: And then certainly neither can you think
ur Souls of little worth, when the Son of God
ought them worth his dying for. He would not

have thought fit to pay so vast a Ransom, as his pr
cious Life, for a thing of small value; yea, Himse
hath assured us, beyond all contradiction, that th
Gain of the whole World, is not sufficient Recom
pence for the Loss of ones Soul.

Again. The Holy Ghost is still carrying on that gre
Work of God's Mercy in the Salvation of our Soul
For their sakes it is that he hath made so many Rev
lations of God's Will to the World, and confirm
them by so many Miracles: Therefore he still follow
us with his preventing and assisting Graces; He i
spires us with good Thoughts, and kindles pious D
sires in us; He warmeth our cold Affections, and e
flameth our Hearts with Devotion; He checks and r
strains us from Sin, and upbraids us when we comm
it; He still importuneth, woeth and intreateth, tha
if possible, he may awaken us into a Sense of o
danger, and excite and quicken us to pursue the M
thods of our own Safety and Happiness. What th
are not our Souls worth, about which the Blessed Sp
rit takes so much care to save and make them happy

The Good Angels are Ministring Spirits for the go
of Souls; they pitch their Tents about them, and thin
it no Disparagement for such glorious Beings as the
are to guard them, and converse with them: The
still wait to receive the Souls of good Men, whe
they depart out of the Body: They rejoyce at th
Conversation of Souls; a certain Sign that they ha
an entire Value for them.

Yea, the Devils themselves do know that, in God
Esteem, nothing is so valuable under the whole He
ven, as the Souls of Men; and therefore, as the grea
est Instance of Spight and Malice they can do to Go
they make it their utmost endeavour to seduce and d
stroy them: They envy the Happiness Men are cap
ble of, and accordingly labour in their Destructio
and triumph when they have accomplished it. Th

Thus you ſee the Soul is of the greateſt Value. How uch then does it behove you to take Care of it? What adneſs is it to ſuffer the Body to engroſs all your Care d Thoughts, your Labour and Time; and to per- it that precious and immortal part of you, your Soul, be overlooked as a thing not worth any ſerious no- e or regard? Eſpecially if you will conſider,

Secondly, That the Loſs of the Soul is the moſt intole- ble of all other Loſſes. For indeed the Soul may be ſt; not that it ſhall ceaſe to be, (it were well for icked Men if it could) but it may be undone d miſerable, and in that ſenſe loſt to all Eternity. -Deprived it may be of that Heaven of Happineſs hich God hath provided for it, of the Enjoyment of m *in whoſe Preſence is fulneſs of Joy, and at whoſe ight-hand there are Pleaſures for evermore.* Nor is is all; the Soul is not only capable of being deprived infinite Bliſs, but of being plunged too in the extre- ity of Deſpair and Miſery; it is liable to be given o- r to the violence and fury of Devils, and Deviliſh pirits; to be committed to the hateful Society of oſe miſerable Beings, where Wrath and Envy, Ma- e and Ill-nature, only are to be found; where no oy, no Peace, no Love, ever enter.

The Miſery of which dreadful State, the Holy Spi- t hath repreſented by Expreſſions, denoting the reateſt Horror and Torment; by *a Lake of Fire and rimſtone, everlaſting Flame, a never-dying Worm, un- uenchable Fire,* &c.

This is the diſmal State the Souls and Bodies of the icked will be condemned unto for ever; wherein hey muſt ſuffer Day and Night, without reſt or in- ermiſſion. O dreadful State! with this Addition to he Extremity of Torments, that they will never ave an end! Some Comfort it might be to thoſe mi-

ſerable Souls, had they hopes of any Deliverance; but it muſt needs exceedingly imbitter every Torment to them, to think of that never-ending Duration of Torment to come: that, after they have been in a conſuming condition for Millions of Millions of Ages in Hell, they have ſtill an eternal Hell behind, and are as far diſtant from the end of their Miſeries, as they were when they firſt begun. This muſt needs plunge the wretched Soul into extreme Deſperation.

This State we are liable to be betrayed unto, we are in great danger of it, and how we came to be ſo, is what I intreat you in the next Place to conſider, and to behave your ſelves accordingly.

Thirdly, Conſider the great danger your Souls are in, by reaſon of Sin. "God created the firſt Man *Adam* "without Sin, and indued his Soul with the full know- "ledge of his Duty; and with ſuch a Strength, that "he might, if he would, perform all that was requi- "red of him. Having thus created the firſt Man, he "made a Covenant or Agreement with him to this pur- "poſe; that if he continued in obedience to God "without committing Sin; then, firſt, that ſtrength "of Soul, which he then had, ſhould ſtill be conti- "nued to him; and ſecondly, that he ſhould never "die, but continue in a State of Happineſs for ever. "But on the other ſide, if he committed Sin and di- "obeyed God, then both he and all his Children af- "ter him ſhould loſe that Knowledge and that per- "fect Strength, which enabled him to do all that "God required of him; And ſecondly, ſhould be "ſubject to Death, and not only ſo, but to Eternal "Damnation in Hell.

"This was the Agreement made with *Adam*, and "all Mankind in him (which we uſually call the firſt "Covenant) upon which God gave *Adam* a particular "Commandment, which was no more but this, that

"he

" he ſhould not preſume to eat of one only Tree of
" that Garden wherein he had placed him; which
" God called, *The Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil.*
" But *Adam*, by the perſuaſion of the Devil, eats of
" that Tree, diſobeys God, and ſo brings that firſt
" Curſe upon himſelf and all his Poſterity: And ſo
" by that one Sin of his, he loſt both thoſe together;
" I ſay, the full knowledge of his Duty, and the
" power of performing it. And we being born after
" his Image, loſt them likewiſe; and ſo are become
" both ignorant in diſcerning what we ought to do,
" and weak and unable to the doing of it; having a
" backwardneſs to all good, and an aptneſs and read-
" neſs to all Evil; like a ſick Stomach, which loaths
" all wholeſom Food, and longs after ſuch Traſh as
" may nouriſh the Diſeaſe. "

This is the Source and Original of all Miſery. The Conſequence hereof is, that we are now expoſed to an infinite Number of Temptations from the World, the Devil, and our own corrupt Nature; that we are ready and inclined to hearken to them, and ſin againſt our Maker; and thereby are in continual danger of being betrayed to that miſerable State before deſcribed: And this, I hope, may be ſufficient at preſent to aſſure you, that your Souls are in Danger. And yet that you may not neglect them as paſt hopes, but may be encouraged to ſet your ſelves in good earneſt to take care of them. Conſider,

Fourthly, What an excellent proviſion God hath pleaſed God, in his wonderful Mercy, to make in order to reſcue and deliver them from theſe dangers; and what is required of us in compliance with this great Mercy. This God hath done by giving us his Son, and in him making a New Covenant with us, after we had broken the firſt.

" He

" *He has given us his Son,* as the great *Captain of* " *our Salvation,* to redeem and Rescue us from the " Power and Dominion of the Devil or Satan, that " great Rebel against God; from whom the Devil ha- " ving caused us to Revolt, he carries us captive at " his Will, causing us to fight against our Maker, as " many as he can detain in his Servitude: But God, " I say, has *given us his Son* to Rescue and Recover " us out of such a fearful State of Sin, Rebellion, " and Misery.

" And this he has done by making in him a New " Covenant with us, after we had broken the First, " that is, by proposing the most gracious Terms of " Reconciliation, through him our great Mediator " and Redeemer; And, by making Satisfaction, as " for our Breach of the first Covenant, so for the Sins " of as many of us as truly repent of our Transgres- " sions under the Second.

" This second Covenant was made with *Adam,* and " us in him, presently after his Fall, and is briefly " contained in these Words, *Gen.* 3. 15. where God " declares, that, *The Seed of the Woman should break the* " *Serpents head*; and this Second Covenant is made " up, as the first was, of some Mercies to be offered " by God, and some Duties to be performed by us.

" God herein promised to send on Earth, his only " Son, who is God equal with himself, to become " Man like unto us in all things; Sin only excepted, " and he to do for us these several things.

" 1. To make known to us the whole will of his " Father in the performance whereof we shall be sure " to be accepted and rewarded by him. And this was " one part of his business, which he performed in those " many Sermons, Doctrines and Precepts we find set " down in the Gospel. And herein he is our Prophet, " for it was the work of a Prophet of old, not only

" to

" to foretel, but to teach. Our duty in this particu-
" lar is to hearken diligently to him, to be moſt ready
" and deſirous to learn that Will of God which he
" came from Heaven to reveal to us.

" 2. The ſecond thing he was to do for us, was to ſa-
" tisfie God for our ſins, not only that one of *Adam*,
" but all the Sins of Mankind that truly repent and a-
" mend, and by this means to obtain for us forgive-
" neſs of Sins, and the favour of God; and to redeem
" us from Hell and Eternal Damnation, which was
" the puniſhment due to our Sin. All this he did
" for us by his Death: He offered up himſelf a ſa-
" crifice for the Sins of all thoſe who heartily bewail
" and forſake them. And in this he is our Prieſt, it
" being anciently the Prieſt's Office to offer ſacrifice
" for the ſins of the People. Our duty in this parti-
" cular is firſt, truly and heartily to repent of our ſins,
" and to forſake them, without which they will ne-
" ver be forgiven us, though that is the thing for
" which Chriſt died. Secondly, ſtedfaſtly to believe,
" that if we give our ſelves up to Chriſt, we ſhall
" have the benefits of that Sacrifice of his; that all our
" ſins, how many and great ſoever, ſhall be forgiven
" us, and we ſhall be ſaved from thoſe Eternal Pu-
" niſhments which were due unto us for them. Ano-
" ther part of the Prieſt's Office was Bleſſing and
" Praying for the People; and this alſo Chriſt per-
" forms for us. It was his ſpecial Commiſſion from
" his Father to Bleſs us, as St. *Peter* tells us, *Acts* 3.
" 26. *God ſent his Son Jeſus to bleſs you*; and the fol-
" lowing Words ſhew wherein that Bleſſing conſiſts,
" *in turning away every one of you from your Iniquity*:
" Thoſe means which he hath uſed for the turning of
" us from our ſins, are to be reckoned of all other, the
" greateſt Bleſſings; and for the other part, that of
" Praying, that he not only performed on Earth, but

" continues

" continues ſtill to do it in Heaven, *He ſits on the right hand of God, and makes requeſt for us*, Rom. 8. 34. Our duty herein is, not to refuſe this unſpeakable Bleſſing of his, but to be willing to be thus bleſt in being turned from our ſins; and not to make void and fruitleſs all his Prayers and Interceſſions for us, which will never prevail for us, whilſt we continue in our Sins.

" 3. The third thing that Chriſt was to do for us, was to enable us, or to give us ſtrength to do what God requires of us. This he doth, Firſt, By taking off from the hardneſs of the Law given to *Adam*, which bound us never to commit the leaſt ſin, upon the pain of Damnation. So that now God requires of us only an honeſt and hearty endeavour to do what we are able, and where we fail of that through weakneſs, he accepts of our ſincere Repentance. Secondly, By ſending his Holy Spirit into our Hearts to govern and rule us, to give us ſtrength to overcome Temptations to Sin, and to do all that he now under the Goſpel requires of us. And in this Chriſt is our King, it being the Office of a King to Govern and Rule, and to ſubdue our Enemies. Our duty in this particular is to give up our ſelves to be obedient Subjects of his, to be governed and ruled by him, to obey all his Laws, not to take part with any Rebel, that is, not to cheriſh any one ſin, but diligently to pray for his Grace to enable us to ſubdue them all, and then carefully to make uſe of it to that purpoſe.

" Laſtly, He has purchaſed for all that faithfully obey him, an eternal glorious inheritance, the Kingdom of Heaven, whether he is gone before to take poſſeſſion for us. Our duty herein is to be exceeding careful that we forfeit not our parts in it: which we ſhall certainly do, if we continue impenitent in

" any

" any sin. Secondly, Not to fasten our Affections on
" this World, but to raise them up to Heaven and
" Heavenly Things, according to the Precept of the
" Apostle, *Col.* 3. 2. *Set your Affections on things above,*
" *and not on things on the Earth,* continually longing
" to come to the possession of that blessed Inheritance
" of ours, in comparison whereof all things here be-
" low should seem vile and mean to us.

" This is the sum of that second Covenant we are
" now under, wherein you see what Christ hath done,
" how he executes those three great Offices of King,
" Priest and Prophet; as also what is required of us,
" without our faithful performance of which, all that
" he hath done shall never stand us in any stead; for
" he will never be a Priest to save any, who take him
" not also for their Prophet to teach, and their King
" to rule them; nay if we neglect our part of this Co-
" venant, our condition will be yet worse than if it
" had never been made; for we shall be to answer
" not for the breach of Law only, as in the first Co-
" venant, but for the abuse of Mercy, which is of all
" sins the most provoking. On the other side, if we
" faithfully perform it, that is, set our selves hearti-
" ly to the obeying of every Precept of Christ; not
" going on wilfully in any one sin, but bewailing and
" forsaking what ever we have formerly been guilty
" of, it is then most certain that all the forementio-
" ned Benefits of Christ belong to us.

" And now you see how little reason you have to
" cast off the care of your Souls, upon a conceit that
" they are past cure; for that it is plain they are not;
" nay certainly they are in that very condition, which
" of all others makes them fittest for our care. If
" they had not been thus Redeemed by Christ, they
" had been then so hopeless, that care would have
" been in vain. On the other side, if his Redemption

" had

" had been such that all Men should be saved by it,
" though they live as they list, we should have
" thought it needless to take care for them, because
" they were safe without it. But it hath pleased God
" so to order it, that our care must be the means by
" which they must receive the good, even of all that
" Christ hath done for them.

And now if you will but lay these things to Heart, your Reason and your Interest will both direct you how to behave your selves. Methinks I hear some of you, as Men deeply affected with the sense of these things, with a serious and compassionate regard to their Souls, crying out with St. *Peter*'s hearers, *Men and Brethren, what must we do to be saved*? I would to God, that every Man would make this application to himself; and if they do not, it is too certain a sign, that either they believe that they have no immortal Souls, or that it is impossible they should for ever miscarry.

Give me leave a little to reason the case with you, my dear Neighbours, to perswade you to take care of your Souls. Are they made after the Image and Similitude of God? Why then will ye suffer them to be transformed to the Image of Satan? Has God provided a Heaven of Happiness for them? Why will ye be so cruel and unjust to them as to expose them to the intolerable Flames of Hell? Since God the Father hath rated them at the highest value, and expressed his chief concern for them: Why will ye neglect and undervalue them as things of no price? since God the Son thought not his own Blood too great a price for them, Why do ye chuse to sell them for the trifling Vanities of this World? since the Holy Ghost is continually at work to preserve them. Whence comes it to pass that ye hardly think them worthy the slenderest part of your care? since the blessed Angels are imployed in ministring unto them: Why do ye de-

feat

feat all their endeavours for your good? since they rejoyce at the Conversion of Souls? Why will ye refuse to afford them this matter of rejoicing, where the greatest advantage will be your own? Wherefore do you seek to gratifie our common Adversary the Devil so far, as to permit him to disappoint the gracious purposes of God towards us? Oh that Men can be so senseless as to see their Souls perishing before their Eyes, without Remorse or Compassion! that they can pass day after day without making any offer or attempt to recover them.

Consider you have not only the sin of your first Parents to be forgiven you, but also innumerable Actual sins of your own; and those perhaps committed against the light of your own Consciences, against the express command of God, against the dictates of the Holy Spirit, against frequent Warnings and Admonitions from others, and contrary to many repeated Vows and Resolutions. These are aggravations sufficient to sink a Soul into the Bottomless Pit; and yet still there is hope, there is a remedy even for such Sinners, if they repent and return from their Sins, and become sincerely obedient to the Laws of God, and accept the Lord *Jesus* as their King, their Priest, and their Prophet, God will for his sake accept them. *Remember that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as Silver and Gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without Blemish, and without Spot*, 1 *Pet.* 1. 18, 19. This was the ransom of Souls which God required; and if you reject this he will accept no other, and you do reject it (and God so interprets it) if you do not accept him upon his own terms; if you do not give up your selves unto Christ, to be guided and governed, as well as saved by him; otherwise you renounce all your part and interest in his Blood, and do as it were, declare you will not be beholding to

him

him: and then surely you cannot complain that God is unmerciful, if he take the Forfeiture, and condemn those who would not be saved by him. The promises and Threatnings of the Gospel, and all other the Methods which God hath used to reform and reclaim Sinners, are all Instances of his great goodness to us, of his zeal and concern for our Happiness; and if we still continue to reject and set them at nought, how just, as well as severe, will be our Condemnation. Has he taken all imaginable care to oblige you to be kind to your selves, and faithful to your truest interest, and will ye still forsake your own Mercies? If you thus wilfully seek your own ruin, how righteous will it be in God to plague you to the utmost extremity.

Let me therefore beseech you, even by all that is Sacred and Serious, by every thing that is Dear and precious to you, by your best hopes, and the most important concern of your everlasting Being, to take pity upon your poor Souls, to consider the dangers whereto they are exposed, to consult and comply with the means of their Preservation.

Learn I pray you to affect your Hearts with a serious sence of your danger, to repent earnestly of your past sins, sincerely resolve to be more Holy, Watchful and Circumspect for the time to come; pray earnestly for the Graces of God's Holy Spirit; cherish in your Souls a lively Faith in the Mercies of God thro' Christ, and in all respects, as God shall enable you, and you shall be hereafter from time to time instructed, let your Prayers and your Endeavours be that you may be wise unto Salvation. And that you may abound in all spiritual Wisdom and Understanding, and may be accepted as faithful Servants of God and our Lord Jesus Christ in the great day of Accounts, as it is the earnest Prayer, so it shall be the constant endeavour of

Your affectionate Servant in Christ Jesus.

FINIS.